3: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1961 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK?

226 one in each hand (Fig. 9), he works the net around the edge of the stockade and empties the fish into palm-leaf baskets (Figs. 10 and 11). Most of the fish weigh less than a pound, but it is not unusual for a weir to yield many hundreds of pounds of fish in a tide change, though sometimes only enough are caught to feed the fishermen. The fish are usually sorted into two or three grades and are often sold on the spot. Several times I saw sharks as large as six feet trapped in the stockade; extracting these monsters was a delicate task. Most of the cuttlefish used as bait in the basket fishtraps come from these palm-stem fishweirs.

There seems to be a direct correlation between the amount of fish caught in a weir and the wind velocity, at least on the Ras Tanura peninsula. The Arabs can estimate their catch simply from the atmospheric conditions prevailing before low tide: if the *shamal*, the strong north wind, has been blowing, the haul is sure to be good.

I never saw the effect of the wind fail. In the fall jumbo shrimp, equal to any found in the Gulf of Mexico, are caught in these weirs. If there had been little wind, the catch would be small, but if the wind had been considerable, there were sure to be several dozen nice shrimp. The 10 weirs on the Tarut Bay side of Ras Tanura yielded at the most only several dozen shrimp, most of which came from two funnel weirs; the shrimp that appeared in local markets in large quantities came from the weirs on the flats around Qatif. The shrimp in Arabian markets is sun-dried, so that it can be stored and sold in any season. [251]

As a rule, the men who work a fishweir get half the profits, and the owner gets the other half. The profits are figured by deducting from the gross return the cost of the workers' food and of the material required to maintain the weir. If a trap fails to produce, the owner sometimes supplies the tenders with cash, which must be repaid later.

In summer the daylight low tide in the Persian Gulf at Ras Tanura is about two feet higher than the minimum, in February. The water does not get low enough in the weirs to trap fish effectively, and the summer catch is therefore poor. Usually trap tenders are assigned to pearl diving and rock mining, possible only in the warmer months; one man is left to collect the small catch and keep the weir in condition. When Ramadan, the great Moslem fast month, falls in summer, the Arabs on Tarut Bay allow their fishweirs to fall into disrepair. It is surprising how fast a weir will disintegrate under even the slight wave action in a sheltered area such as Tarut Bay. In 1945 there were several strong shamals during Ramadan (then the last two weeks in July and the first two in August), which, coupled with the [228 464]

[Text continued on p. 393]

PLATE 18

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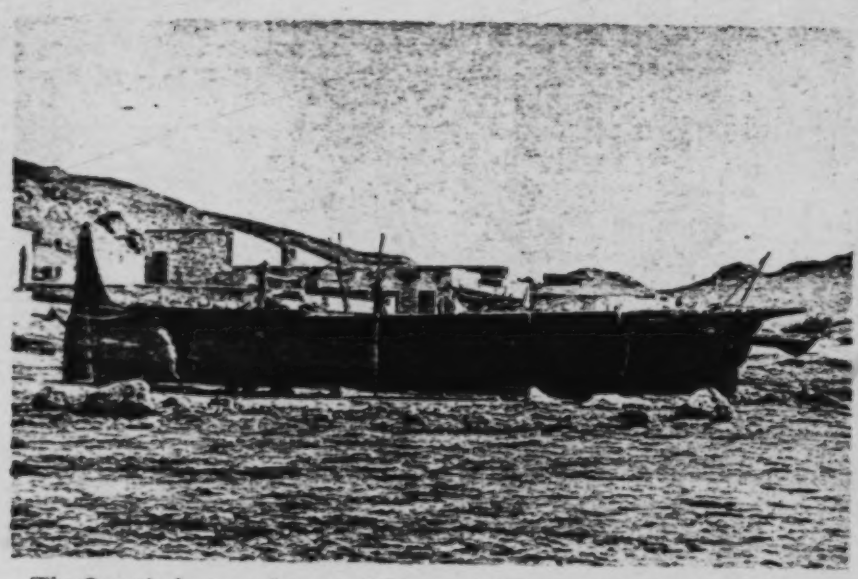

The Omani who coast down to Africa and fish along the way haul their *bedans* out periodically, lay the fish out to dry, and oil the hulls; this one is at Mukalla

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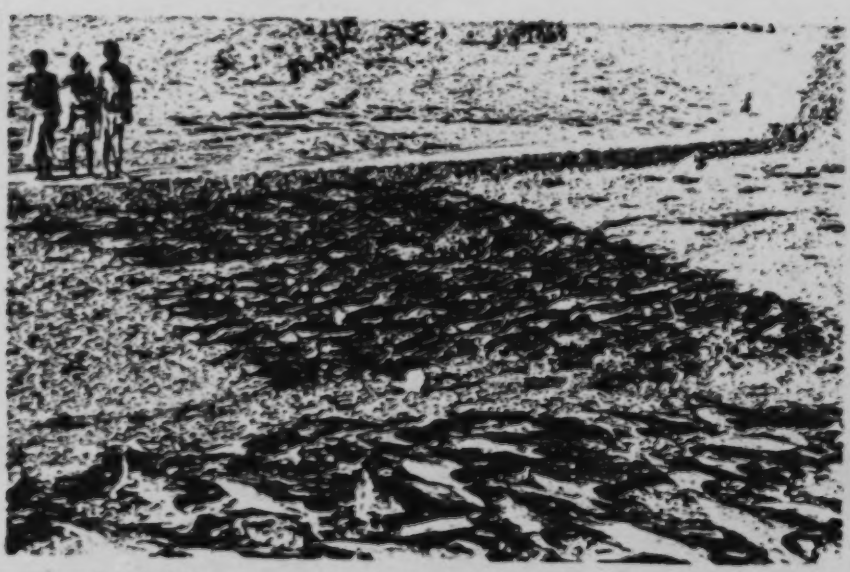

Tuna fish drying in the sun at Mukalla. The Omani carry large quantities of dried fish down the South Arabian and East African coasts, coasting down on one monsoon and back on the other

[FACING P. 190B]

White radishes	100	5
Lemons	40	5
Other fresh vegetables	400	15
10 live sheep	1100	40
15 live sheep and goats	1500	80
	Total Rs.	1502

It should be noted that rice constitutes one-third of the cost. The other great staple at sea—fish—is not listed accurately, as most of it is caught fresh; probably between two thousand and three thousand pounds of fresh fish was eaten. It should also be noted that no charge occurs for water. The dhow will take a tank of bad water rather than pay for it.

The Arab dhow, regardless of its size, always has a fish-line overboard, and it is not uncommon to see half a dozen lines overboard. I have caught many fish myself trailing a line from a dhow in the Persian Gulf. Villiers[88] states that fishing off the whole African coast is particularly good and that it is not uncommon for the many lines trailed from a Kuwait *bhum* to net twenty to thirty large fish a day. The fish not eaten are cleaned by splitting, are pounded in salt, and then hung in the sun to dry; the sailors never bother to scale the fish.

The galley on an Arab dhow is simply a spot on the deck. The stove consists simply of an open-sided box with some sand and cooking stones on the bottom (see Plate 21—top left). The larger the dhow the larger the fire-box. The cook cooks everything here with wood fires of palm wood, brush, or driftwood.

On dhows of South Arabia and the Gulf of Aden ports there is also a bread oven. I have never seen these on dhows from the Persian Gulf or Gulf of Oman. The oven consists of a wide-mouthed pot perhaps fifteen or eighteen inches in diameter; this pot is put inside a barrel about two and one-half or three feet in diameter and the space around the pot is filled with sand (see Plate 21—top right). The barrel is firmly lashed together and then is usually securely lashed to the deck. To bake bread, the cook builds a fire in the bottom of the pot and allows it to burn down to the coals. Then he takes a flat piece of dough like a large pancake and pastes this on the inside of the pot; the heat in the walls of the pot and the coals bake the bread. This is the Arab *khubuz*, one of the staples of the Arab at sea as well as on land.

VI

It is difficult for one totally unfamiliar with the Arab East to understand the economic system of the Arabs. The tenets of Islam prevent any

[88] A. Villiers, 55, p. 150.